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Sisters Anastasia (right) and Natalia enjoy their new habitat at Black Beauty Ranch.

ROOM TO RUN

THE 300-POUND TIGER SPLASHES AROUND, playing with water as it flows into a pond.

"Natalia has really embraced her inner fish," says a laughing Katherine Birk, lead wildlife caregiver at the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch. "She likes to be in the water all the time." Meanwhile, Anastasia surveys her surroundings from high atop a platform.

The 11-year-old sisters were the first of the ranch's four tigers to be introduced to a new 5-acre big cat habitat this summer. Alex, a rambunctious 4-year-old, was next. "He is really going to be able to utilize every aspect of the habitat," Birk says, "and he has a lot of energy to expend."

Twelve-year-old Gustavo, the oldest of the resident tigers, will be the last to join the others. For tigers who have spent most of their lives confined in small spaces, the expansive natural habitat can be intimidating. Gustavo's caregivers are waiting

for him to become comfortable with his transport cage before moving him over.

The new habitat is the first of three construction phases—funding allowing—planned for a newly acquired 40-acre parcel of land. It's a far cry from the tiny cages these tigers once called home. Alex was found living in squalor, abandoned by a private owner in Kansas, while the other three were rescued from a roadside zoo in Mississippi.

The tigers are now busy exploring their new digs, climbing to the top of the waterfall, sharpening their claws on trees, taking dips in the lagoon and rolling around in the tall grass. And for the first time in their lives they have enough space to run at full speed—35 miles per hour. "We've actually seen that already," Birk says. "The girls like to hide in the brush and attack each other playfully. It's been fun to watch them run and play."

+ ON THE IPAD: View a slideshow of the tigers in their new habitat.

THE LITTLE SQUIRREL THAT COULD

Unfortunately, it's a common occurrence at the South Florida Wildlife Center: A squirrel is brought in with injuries to her back legs, likely as a result of being hit by a car. Most recover after receiving care. But this little squirrel was different. She was very thin and dehydrated, and she wouldn't eat.

Radiographs showed an abnormality in the squirrel's hip but no obvious fracture, so veterinarian Renata Schneider treated her for traumatic injury with pain medications and antibiotics. Still, the squirrel refused to eat—and Schneider refused to give up. The staff fed her by hand, and eventually the squirrel got a little stronger. With



K-Laser therapy, she began to regain the use of her legs.

Three weeks into treatment, she had improved enough to move into an outdoor habitat. And after nearly a month of hand feeding, she finally began eating on her own. "When I had a hard time catching her, I said, 'OK, she's ready,'" Schneider says.

The squirrel was released back in her old neighborhood in July. "She went up a tree so fast that I felt she knew exactly where she was. It was awesome!"

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